



Nurturing Tacit Knowledge through a Knowledge Centered Culture for Organizational Agility

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Abstract

Organizations are battling with unending demand for improved and quality service delivery from her customers. This requires new approaches to knowledge culture that facilitates sharing of tacit knowledge among all the stakeholders of an organization. Service delivery has been one of the major focus areas of organizational transformation and public sector reforms in Kenyan Government. Competition among the players pushes the organizations to come up with strategies of becoming and remaining agile. Organizations are realizing the importance of knowledge centered culture to enable them share knowledge efficiently and effectively as knowledge that is not well managed and shared corrodes easily. The concern of this paper is that existing tacit knowledge may be lost if not tapped. Failure of tapping into tacit knowledge affects organizational agility negatively. How to retain or tap tacit knowledge remains an area of interest to researchers. This paper foresees an urgent need of coming up with the most effective mechanisms for tapping tacit knowledge within the organization. Tacit knowledge according to this paper is meant to be that knowledge that is intrinsic, in form of ideas experiences and emotions. Knowledge centered culture is taken to mean an organizational culture that allows knowledge related activities which later necessitates smooth flow of knowledge. Organizational agility is seen as that organization that is able to swiftly manage change, pursue opportunities and maintain competitive advantage while remaining a learning organization and innovative.

Key words: Knowledge centered culture, tacit knowledge sharing, organizational agility

Introduction

Environment for tacit knowledge sharing

Voluntary knowledge sharing behaviour at organizational level has become essential for knowledge management and considered. This is being considered crucial for organizational effectiveness while viewing individual, organizational and technological factors that facilitate successful flow of knowledge (Aris, 2013).

Ekta (2013) reported that knowledge sharing success is dependent on several factors such as organizational culture, environment which involves a high level of employee participation, understanding and measuring employee perceptions. Maria (2014) acknowledged processes that facilitate knowledge sharing and studied the impact of those processes on

organizational performance. His main forms for knowledge sharing were suggestion boxes, workshops and transversal projects for improvement. He highlighted people as the sources of knowledge. He saw knowledge sharing as a building block for the success of any organization. To date, this is being adopted as a survival strategy by successful organizations.

The role of Knowledge Centered Culture and Organizational Agility

Knowledge centered culture has been defined as a set of organizational values, norms, and beliefs on the basis of which the employees create, share, and apply knowledge in the organization. This has been identified as an important antecedent to knowledge sharing in individuals with high levels of trust propensity (Ferreira & Francisca 2014). Knowledge centered culture is termed as a rigid tacit infrastructure of ideas that shape our thinking, our behaviour and perception of our business environment. It is an environment that makes knowledge sharing a norm with a crucial objective of attaining agility (Gurteen, 2017)

A study by Peralta and Saldanha, (2014) on knowledge centered culture and knowledge sharing with moderator role of trust established that knowledge centered culture is a solid platform to salvage organizational tacit knowledge which contributes significantly to an agile organization. Knowledge centered culture is being viewed as a critical success factor of knowledge management practices by the organizations in pursuit of organizational agility (Ajmal, Helo, & Kekale, 2010). While tacit knowledge sharing may be of great benefits to both the employees and the organization, there seems to be problems within the organizations in coming up with strategies of tapping it, exploiting it, making it

sustainable and using it as competitive advantage.

An agile organization is associated with a culture that enables the creation of a knowledge *ba* which is the place or context for the creation of both individual and collective knowledge. Tacit knowledge sharing can be made possible if commitment to share knowledge is part of the business strategy of any organization. Managing organizational knowledge needs an appropriate strategy (Witherspoon, Bergner, Cockrell, & Stone 2013).

Theory and Hypothesis

This study adopted the three theories and the SECI Model which are explained here below:-

SECI Model - This model has a lot of weight in this study as knowledge takes place in social exchange and through people, where people have to participate in knowledge exchange. Participation being a variable that is being considered while attempting to understand knowledge centred culture has been found to have a significant influence on both tacit knowledge sharing initiatives and organizational agility.

Self - efficacy theory - This is a theory of motivation. The theory asserts that individuals with high self- efficacy as well as those who are intrinsically motivated are more willing to share knowledge (Linn, 2011; Welshmen et al., 2012). Individuals with high level of self-determination are more likely to share their tacit knowledge. The study chose this theory as intrinsic motivators are proposed to have a positive significance in a knowledge centered culture. Motivation as an independent variable established that people are pushed to spend time to share knowledge as well as building a norm of sharing knowledge where intrinsic motivators exists.

Self- determination Theory - This theory asserts that one has the capability to perform a task or behaviour. It is the belief that one has the power to produce that

effect by completing a given task or activity related to that competency. It relates to a person's perception of their ability to reach a goal. It is the expectation that one can master a situation, and produce a positive outcome. Self-efficacy is an important concept in tacit knowledge sharing (Alberta, 2015). This study chose this theory on the basis that employees can achieve their best given the right environment and platform. A knowledge centered culture can trigger a behaviour of effectiveness and efficiency as shown in the findings of this study

Theory of reasoned Action - The theory suggests that stronger intensions lead to increased effort to perform the behaviour, which also increases the likelihood for the behaviour to be performed. Attitudes and personal norms play an important role in this theory. This theory was selected to assist in understanding the role of trust in both tacit knowledge sharing and organizational agility aspects. The study established that if the level of trust is high, people will share their tacit knowledge. The four theories put together formed the basis of understanding how a knowledge centered culture can facilitate tacit knowledge sharing activities and therefore achieve the organization to remain agile.

Hypothesis

Table 1 Reliability Analysis

Variable	Coefficient	N	Comment
	Employees		
Participation	0.786	4	Acceptable
Knowledge <i>ba</i>	0.720	5	Acceptable
Motivation	0.833	4	Acceptable
Trust	0.748	3	Acceptable
Time	0.735	3	Acceptable
Organization agility	0.865	14	Acceptable
Tacit knowledge sharing	0.872	15	Acceptable

(Source: Authors, 2017)

The findings established that all the aspects under study registered Cronbach Alpha coefficients more than the acceptable 0.7

This study hypothesizes that knowledge centered culture facilitates smooth flow of tacit knowledge and thus enabling an organization to remain agile.

Design/methodology/approach

The realization of the value of a knowledge centered culture, the role of tacit knowledge sharing and the end result of an agile organization is as a result of review of extant empirical literature. The study was composed of 384 respondents of members who contribute to National Hospital Insurance Fund. 362 respondents responded through a structured questionnaire giving a 91% response. Regression analysis confirmed the hypothesis posed.

Results

There is need for organizations to establish an environment where tacit knowledge can be shared freely. This can easily be achieved if an organization establishes a knowledge *ba*. Organizations should also come up with mechanisms which allow employees to actively participate in tacit sharing activities. Intrinsic motivators should be enhanced. The tables below shows how each variable responded.

value. Participation had coefficients of 0.786 and 0.791 respectively. Knowledge *ba* had coefficients of 0.720 and 0.735;

motivation had 0.833 and 0.882; trust had 0.748 and 0.779 and time had 0.735 and 0.720. The findings further pointed out that

organization agility had coefficients of 0.865 and 0.889 while tacit knowledge sharing had coefficients of 0.872 and 0.766.

Table 2 Knowledge *ba*

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
Management is a good example to employees in setting standards of behaviour which drives a vision of customer focus.	3.7232	.41881
NHIF management has provided employees with an environment where people are encouraged to explore, discover, take risks and develop trust.	3.1441	.30626
NHIF has a well-developed tacit knowledge platform anchored to its mission statement.	2.9643	.75151
NHIF information systems facilitate the sharing of information and knowledge across all the stakeholders.	4.2143	.26904
There is need for NHIF to provide online networks and social gatherings.	3.0357	.30093
Aggregate Score	3.4163	

(Source: Authors, 2017)

While testing the existence of a knowledge *ba*, the results above indicated that channels of how the employees received the information was well set out as shown by mean (4). The organization should however come up with strategies of establishing a knowledge *ba* (2.9) which

should be well anchored in the organizational mission statement. The organization should at the same time encourage sharing of knowledge through online networks and promote social gatherings.

Table 3 Motivation

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
NHIF management respects and appreciates knowledge workers.	3.2768	.74633
NHIF pairs juniors and seniors in order to share knowledge	3.1696	.66156
NHIF is a flat organization which makes knowledge sharing easy	3.0536	.69864
There is motivation for employees to share knowledge at NHIF.	4.0446	.29852
Aggregate Score	3.3862	

(Source: Authors, 2017)

Table 3 above shows that employees are well motivated to share their tacit knowledge (4) while employees disagreed on transparency of the organization on the basis flatness of the organization (3). The

result showed the management does not respect and appreciate knowledge workers (3). Mentorship through pairing of juniors and seniors to enable sharing of knowledge is not practiced (3).

Table 4 Trust

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
NHIF is transparent on issues relating to new information to her employees.	3.6161	.72471
I belief that my employer equips every employee with knowledge and skills so as to perform the task better.	3.5089	.78261
Employees' views are considered when raised through the right channel.	3.9554	.76392
Aggregate Score	3.6935	

(Source: Authors, 2017)

The result above shows that the element of trust is well understood and the employees agreed. The mean of (4) agrees that if the views are passed through the right channel, the management takes action. There is transparency on the issues of information flow as pertains the employees.

Table 5 Time

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is need to create time to train employees on knowledge policies at NHIF.	4.0446	.69852
There is general lack of time to share knowledge at NHIF.	3.6161	.72471
It is sometimes difficult to reach to the person who has the solution to a problem at NHIF.	3.5089	.78261
Aggregate Score	3.7232	

(Source: Authors, 2017)

The results showed that there is need for creating more time where employees can be trained on policies of sharing knowledge (4). It was established that it is sometimes difficult to reach the person who the knowledge to a certain problem (3.5). At the same time there is lack of available time to share tacit knowledge (3.6).

Table 6 Tacit Knowledge Sharing

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
NHIF has established a page (wiki) where employees can share their ideas, pass hot spot information and track emerging customer needs	2.5536	.94763

NHIF has assigned mentors to junior officers where experiences can be passed on	2.5982	.85828
NHIF has embraced succession planning programs	2.9189	.89211
NHIF is committed in rewarding employees who actively share their knowledge	2.3036	.82977
NHIF has established face-to-face opportunities where members meet to exchange knowledge	2.5446	
NHIF has made knowledge sharing a routine for all employees	2.4732	.94656
NHIF has established problem solving sessions where members can learn from the problems.	2.3661	.98045
NHIF employees are involved in brainstorming programs which allows new knowledge to flow.	2.0268	.95232
There is a task force to draft a knowledge sharing strategy at NHIF.	2.7321	.80047
NHIF has extra-curricular activities where employees can socialize outside office hours allowing employees to pursue collaborations and innovation.	3.7411	.99318
NHIF has a calendar for departmental and teams retreats whose aim is to broaden the organizational knowledge.	4.0901	.53171
NHIF has a participative goal setting, measuring and feedback for tacit knowledge.	4.1429	.78105
NHIF employees are free to ask questions and get feedback.	2.5446	.46975
NHIF has established communities of practice to ensure organization's competitiveness.	3.9732	.56088
Aggregate Score	2.9292	

(Source: Authors, 2017)

The results showed that respondent were almost neutral to almost all the questions posed on tacit knowledge sharing saw a mean of (3) indicating tacit knowledge sharing is rarely or list practiced. However, the respondents indicated that the organization has a participative goal setting.

Table 7 Descriptive Statistics on Organizational Agility

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel that NHIF has values that are aimed at efficiency.	3.4107	.98231
All employees undergo skills development programs at NHIF.	3.7768	.75243

I have witnessed employees with huge experience and knowledge leave NHIF in the last two years.	3.7589	.88272
NHIF employees are empowered to make simple and quick decisions on behalf of the management.	3.3929	.86175
NHIF has a culture that embraces knowledge sharing.	3.1518	.85706
NHIF pays for skills and knowledge that contribute to performance.	3.2679	.89945
NHIF encourages innovation through knowledge sharing.	3.9286	.57983
NHIF has employee's empowerment and participation programs.	3.8304	.89933
I feel that NHIF knows how to adjust for the benefit of her members.	4.0625	.52635
I feel that NHIF delivers effective business processes.	3.6250	.73116
NHIF is known for speed in implementation of customers' expectations.	3.1696	.84738
I feel that NHIF uses the state-of-the-art technologies.	4.1964	.30881
I feel that the quality of products that NHIF offers to her members are superior compared to other health insurance providers.	3.5536	.75805
I feel that my organization motivates and maintains proficient employees.	4.3832	.76040
As a member of NHIF, I enjoy customer intimacy and value.	4.2791	.66246
Aggregate Score	3.7192	

(Source: Authors, 2017)

The results on organizational agility indicated that the employees were motivated to share and that the organization has strategies of maintaining proficient employees (4.4) The employees also feel valued and enjoys customer intimacy (4.2) however, respondents felt that the organization need to improve on the speed so as to serve the clients better (3). Furthermore, the respondents did not agree with the statement that the organization has a culture that embraces tacit knowledge sharing (3).

Discussion

Knowledge *ba* - The results shows that knowledge *ba* has not been widely

discussed and as such, there is an urge need to enlighten the organizations on the relevance of setting up a platform or space or structure where which can aid in tacit knowledge flow. The findings concurs with the studies done by Sabherwak & Becerra, (2003) which viewed a knowledge *ba* as a problem - solving systems based on technology like case-based reasoning whose aim is to help the organization in achieving its agility. The respondents felt that the presence of a knowledge *ba* was not felt.

Participation - A study by Mehrabi, Siyadat & Allameh, (2013) emphasised the need of employees' participation in

decision making process as a way of boosting organizational agility. This study agrees with their study as the more employees are engaged and allowed to participate both in tacit knowledge sharing activities and decision making the more efficient and effective becomes and thus a sign of organizational agility.

Motivation – A study by Yeon, et al., (2015) found that sharing knowledge depends heavily on motivation aspect, either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. This study supports their study as respondents indicated that they will share their tacit knowledge if they are intrinsically motivated. Wang and Hou (2015) in their research also expressed that both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards has a positive influence on knowledge sharing activities. He urged the management to take time to understand these motivational factors as they have a role to play among the persons who engage in tacit knowledge sharing. This study advises the management to come up with varieties of both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.

Knowledge centered culture – The findings concurred with the study done by Peralta & Saldanha, (2014) which indicated the need to test knowledge centered culture using other variables other than trust alone. The inclusion of knowledge *ba* and participation gives a new dimension for researchers and added new knowledge to the body of research. Study findings indicated that knowledge centered culture has a significant impact on organizational agility. At the same time, tacit knowledge sharing influenced positively the organizational agility.

Tacit knowledge sharing – This study fulfilled the recommendations of Asrar & Anwar (2016) who pointed out the need to carry out a research on knowledge sharing practices in developing countries. This study has established that tacit knowledge sharing activities are not yet fully embraced. This calls for vibrant trainings

for the need to share. At the same time, the study supports the study by Welshmen, et al., (2012) that indicated the need to salvage the existing tacit knowledge in the organization through a knowledge culture so as to remain agile

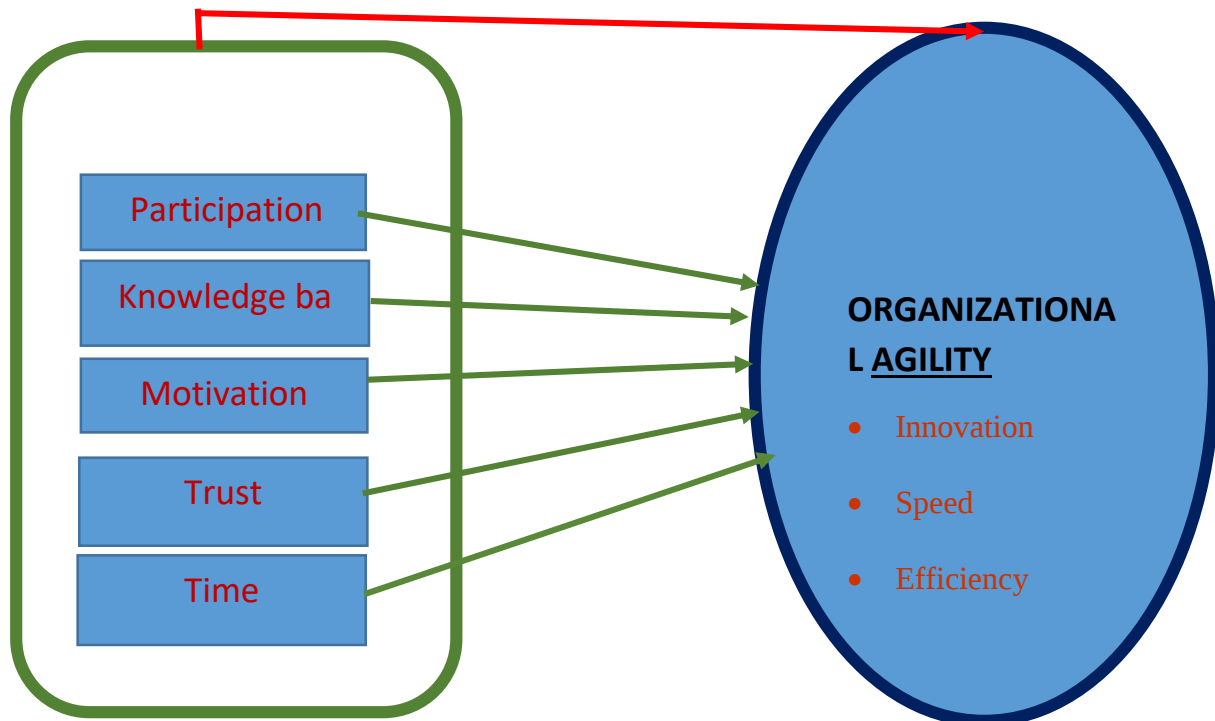
Organizational agility - Agility is the ability to respond and react to environmental changes in a quick and timely manner. To be successful in today's competitive world, organizations and institutions must take steps towards agility (Abbasi et al, 2013). This study concurs with this research as the respondents expressed the need for NHIF to improve on the speed as they serve her clients.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- 1) Organizations should come up with a culture which embraces strategies of how to tap and reserve the tacit knowledge.
- 2) The relevance of a knowledge *ba* should be given a priority by organizations whose aim is reaching and attaining agility.
- 3) The strategy of tacit knowledge sharing should be anchored on the vision of the organization. Tacit knowledge sharing in an organizational setup should be an organizational norm.
- 4) There is need for organizations to evaluate their culture as a culture that embraces tacit knowledge sharing has higher chances of remaining competitive. This can be done by bringing in intrinsic motivators and creating more time to share knowledge.
- 5) Though little literature exists on knowledge centered culture in Kenya, the results points at urgent need for organization to re-look at their indicators of both culture and tacit knowledge sharing to avoid pitfalls on their endeavor to achieving agility. Knowledge *ba* and members participation should be given a higher opportunity.

Conceptualisation

KNOWLEDGE CENTERED CULTURE AND ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY



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